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COURTS & CRIME NEWS

A Chesapeake couple was defrauded in a scheme targeting the elderly. A 78-year-old man faces up to 20 years for his role.

By JESSICA NOLTE
THE VIRGINIAN-PILOT | NOV 05, 2020

FEEDBACK

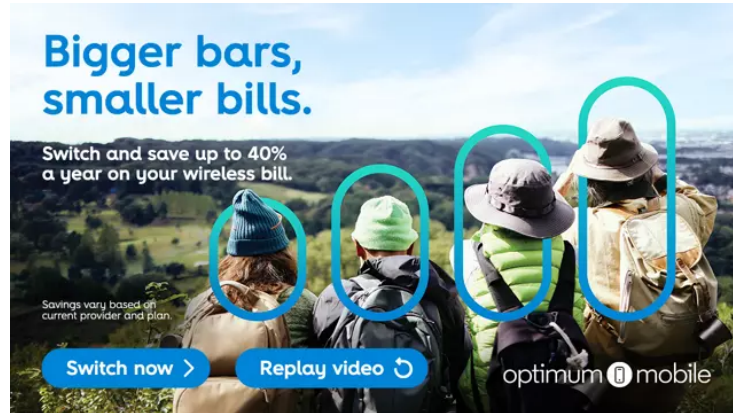


Kent Maerki was indicted March 21, 2019, in U.S. District Court on mail and wire fraud charges. (YouTube screencap)

A retired couple in Chesapeake expected to make hundreds of dollars a month after investing in a franchise but after nearly five months, the couple hadn't seen a penny.

The couple — not named in federal court documents — paid \$100,000 for four separate Dental Support Plus “franchise units” in 2012 expecting to make \$200 a month from each unit. Instead, they wound up losing their entire investment.

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The couple were victims in a multi-million dollar investment fraud conspiracy that targeted elderly people in several areas across the country, including multiple people in Hampton Roads.

Kent Maerki, 78, of Scottsdale, Arizona, pleaded guilty Thursday in U.S. District Court in Norfolk to conspiring to commit mail and wire fraud for his role in the scheme.

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Maerki, along with his co-conspirators, founded Dental Support Plus in November 2010. They claimed it was a dental marketing program that would refer patients to dentists, and in return, the dentists would give a portion of the fees they earned from these patients back to the franchise entity, according to court documents. The business model was based on a failed investment, Dazzle Dental.

FEEDBACK

While Maerki was often not present when salespeople pitched the investment to clients, he knew about the sales and provided false information about the investment opportunity on radio shows and business materials used to solicit investments, according to the documents.

Maerki’s guilty plea also included his involvement in a second scam — the sale of Federal Communications Commission spectrum licenses for a company called Janus Spectrum.

Court documents say he falsely claimed Sprint and other companies were going to need the 800 MHz spectrum he was selling even though it could not be used for broadband transmission. Maerki made these claims knowing the spectrum investments were “extremely high risk” and had little value.

Some investors spent tens of thousands of dollars, but the cost of obtaining some of the spectrum licenses could have been as low as a few hundred dollars.

Maerki's involvement in the schemes came after [the Securities and Exchange Commission ordered him to stop selling securities in 1984](#) and the National Association of Securities Dealers barred him from working in the securities industry in 1988, according to the documents.

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Maerki made over \$4 million from the schemes while the victims' losses exceeded \$23 million, according to the documents.

For the conspiracy to commit mail and wire fraud charge, Maerki faces a maximum penalty of 20 years in prison when sentenced March 15, 2021. Actual sentences for federal crimes are usually less than the maximum penalties.

While he was awaiting trial, [a judge revoked Maerki's bond](#), sending him to jail in December after prosecutors alleged he was still scheming after his arrest. Prosecutors referenced a number of posts on his social media pages and a website he created that offered advice such as three steps to real estate investment.

"It appears he's looking to have people reaching out to him in relation to investments," an IRS agent, Andrew Bowers, said during the December hearing.

Jessica Nolte, 757-247-4513, jnolte@dailypress.com

Topics: [For the Record](#)



Jessica Nolte
Staff Writer



Jessica Nolte is a breaking news reporter for the Daily Press. She graduated from VCU in 2017 and worked as an outreach and social media specialist before joining the paper in June 2018.

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